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ABSTRACT

World War II was a turning point in global history, an event that had a large and lasting impact on many peop'e and places across broad areas of the earth. Compared to other wars, World War II involved the largest armed forces, the longest battle lines, the most destructive weapons, the most casualties, the most destruction of cities and other human assets, and the highest monetary expenditures. Thus, World War II deserves a prominent place in the middle and high school social studies curriculum. Using historical statistics is an often neglected but potentially fruitful way to teach about the causes, conditions, and consequences of World War II. This Digest presents a rationale for using historical statistics to teach about World War II, discusses instructional methods for doing so, and recommends World Wide Web resources to facilitate teaching and learning with statistics about World War II. (Contains 19 references.) (Author/BB)

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Using Historical Statistics to Teach about World War II

By Carl R. Siler

World War II was a turning point in global history, an event that had a large and lasting impact on many people and places across broad areas of the earth. Compared to other wars, World War II involved the largest armed forces, the longest battle lines, the most destructive weapons, the most casualties, the most destruction of cities and other human assets, and the highest monetary expenditures. Thus, World War II deserves a prominent place in the middle school and high school social studies curriculum.

Using historical statistics is an often neglected but potentially fruitful way to teach about the causes, conditions, and consequences of World War II. This Digest presents a rationale for using historical statistics to teach about World War II, discusses instructional methods for doing so, and recommends World Wide Web resources to facilitate teaching and learning with statistics about World War II.

Why Teach with Statistics about World War II. The study of history conjoins content with processes, subject matter with cognitive skills. It involves reflection and judgment based on evidence, including statistical data. Teachers who use World War II statistics can enable their students to integrate historical knowledge with inquiry skills, such as the organization, interpretation, and evaluation of data, in making warranted conclusions.

Using statistical tables and graphs allows teachers to make history more interesting to students, to teach it more effectively, and to break away from total reliance on the textbook. Indeed, an innovative teacher who uses statistics can easily adapt his or her curriculum to better meet the needs of students.

Another argument in favor of teaching with statistics is that standards for teaching and learning history emphasize skills in using historical statistics about World War II and other topics. The *National Standards for History*, for example, stress the importance of such skills as using quantitative data to clarify, interpret, and compare events and developments. These standards also call for students to employ quantitative analyses in their inquiries and to support interpretations with historical evidence, including statistics. Thus, students using statistics in the classroom would "construct closely reasoned arguments rather than facile opinions" about key topics in the curriculum, such as World War II (National Center for History in the Schools 1996, 68).

In addition, by using historical statistics about World War II and other topics, teachers can prompt students to be more actively involved in learning, improve student participation, and enhance student understanding. Finally, by using statistics, teachers can systematically engage students in such higher order cognitive skills as analysis and synthesis of data.

Instructional Methods for Using Historical Statistics. There is an abundance of statistical data readily available to teachers and students engaged in inquiries about World War II. World Wide Web sites and references listed in this Digest are rich and reliable sources of information on such topics as soldiers on active duty, casualties, production of weapons, war costs, shipping losses, and aircraft losses for the United States and other major powers involved in the war.

Several strategies using statistics allow students to develop their data interpretation skills, improve their understanding of World War II, and progress to higher order, critical thinking skills. An integral component of this strategy is questions about statistical tables and graphs.

The teacher's questions can be divided into three levels: level one involves students accurately reading and interpreting statistical data charts; level two requires students to make comparisons using data; level three includes analysis, judgments, and applications. At this level, students must analyze data within a historical context, make historical judgments, and apply the data to new circumstances. For example, students might be required to interpret data about the size of the United States armed forces from 1939 through 1945. Or they could comparatively analyze a statistical table about the peak strengths of armed forces of various countries on different sides of the war from 1939-1945. Tables and graphs on the war costs of various nations, from 1939-1945, also offer opportunities to develop skills in comparative analysis of data.

Students' skills in synthesizing data can be developed by requiring them to systematically organize raw data by constructing tables and graphs. Their reflective thinking skills can be honed by using statistical data as evidence from which to construct and defend generalizations or with which to support or refute statements of others in books or in classroom discussions.

Historical statistics lend themselves to a variety of teaching strategies depending upon the educational needs of the students. The teacher is limited only by his or her creativity. For example, teachers can use World War II statistics in a variety of classroom situations including group discussion, homework, cooperative group activity, or classroom lectures.

World Wide Web Resources. Students can sharpen their research skills by formulating questions about World War II, which they then answer by seeking and compiling statistical data. Teachers can, for example, direct students to gather information from the following World Wide Web sites, which are a sampling of the many that include statistical data on World War II.

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HyperWar: Hypertext History of the Second World War. This site includes data about all aspects of World War II, including military campaigns, personnel, and command structures of the United States armed forces, in all theaters of operations in World War II. <www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/index.html>

The History Place: Statistics of World War II. This section of The History Place Web site provides a variety of data about military forces and operations of World War II, such as total deaths for the war in Europe and the Pacific. It also includes information on African Americans and other minorities in the United States armed forces.
<www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/statistics.htm>

National D-Day Museum. This site provides statistical data and related information about the D-Day invasion of Europe by Allied forces on June 6, 1944. <www.ddaymuseum.org>

History Channel on World War II. This Web site, which is associated with the History Channel cable television network, provides data on all aspects of World War II. <www.historychannel.com/wwii/>

World War II Casualties. This page, part of the Navy Historical Center Web site maintained by the Department of the Navy, provides comprehensive statistical information on U.S. Navy and Marine Corp casualties in World War II. <www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq11-1.html>

U.S. Army Women's Museum WAAC/WAC World War II Statistics. This site features various statistics on both the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and the Women's Army Corp (WAC), which replaced the WAAC in 1943. <www.awm.lee.army.mil>

World War II: Information and Statistics on the German Armed Forces. Statistics and other information about the German armed forces and comparative data about the armed forces, war costs, and military losses of all countries in the war are available here. <www.violentpeace.com/>

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most large libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

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